2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

During the journey to Ras-al-Khaimah, which we undertook in a large sailing dhow, he related some interesting facts about the Mohammedan religion and its *tabus*. The majority of Europeans, he said, often imagined that to the true follower of the Prophet the dog was anathema, not to be touched or mentioned in conversation. Now it was very true that some of the stricter sects of Islam regarded the dog as unclean, but this view was not generally held by the tribes in Oman, who were fond of their dogs, fed and treated them well, and regarded them as household pets. One should, however, always wash one's hands after touching a desert dog. Knowing our pai dog, we unequivocally agreed with this dictum, for these pariahs are never washed and, though his short brown hair looks clean and in good condition, it is usually crawling with lice and other vermin.

The pai is a descendant of the wild dog of the desert, but he has been domesticated for centuries and has all the virtues of the tamed household pet. Although exceedingly timid by disposition, he will bark fiercely at undesirable visitors and makes an excellent watch-dog for that reason, although he rarely attacks and is easily driven off. He is so accustomed to being bullied and stoned by village children, that if one merely bends down and pretends to pick up a stone he will take to his legs with a yelp. He is the laziest creature imaginable and will spend all his days lying in the sun, oblivious of the scores of flies which settle on his eyes and nose, too tired to flick them off. When approached, he will roll over on his back and stick his legs up in the air, as if to say: 'I am defenceless: do with me what you will'.

Pai dogs have very little 'character', are incurably sentimental and lacking in common sense; they have no traffic sense and are constantly run over by cars. Yet in time one grows fond of them. Like most dogs, they are loyal to one master and enjoy nothing so much as to be petted or to lie on a rug and dream. In appearance they resemble the English whippet, but have the head of a terrier, and their run is something of a trot. Their short-haired coats are of a rich golden brown, running to light fawn on the head and belly. The sheikhs breed a special kind of hunting dog, which is fast and cunning and is used for gazelle hunting. These animals are similar to the pai dog, but have sharper faces and long, silky brown hair. They are probably a cross between the pai dog and the saluki.

The sea in the creek was very calm and the gentle breeze scarcely stirred our sails, so that we took nearly twenty minutes to cross the

The pure-blooded Bedouin, the gypsy of the desert, whom one finds all over Arabia, is the most orthodox of all Arabs. He scorns with pious horror the tales of witches, djinns and devils. Yet even he will hesitate to slay a hyena; for do not witches ride upon their backs when the moon is full? One cannot condemn these children of the sands for holding the unknown in such awe, or for peopling the *wadhis* and caves with imaginary forms. There are people to-day in Ireland who believe in *sidhe* (fairies), descendants of the Firbolgs, and who shudder at the mention of banshee or leprechaun; the Scottish highlander is little less credulous, whilst in lonely parts of Wales old women still practise sorcery and stick pins in waxen images.

The Arabs have some reason to be superstitious. There is something formidable and furtive about the limitless expanse of the desert, with its distant mountains, its mirages and deep silences. Time in the clock sense has no meaning, and to-day is but yesterday to-morrow. Those who pray daily that the wells may not dry up; who subsist on rice and dates and dried fish; whose sole possessions are a camel, a donkey, two wives and a tent or palm-leaf hut, must think in terms of simple equations. If they personalize the unknown and the elements which control their lives, who are we to criticize them?

The stars that nightly twinkle above their goats'-hair tents; the Shimal that blows sand-clouds into their eyes and ears, and the pitiless sun which blackens every plant that dares to show a blade in summer—all these are no mere scientific phenomena to the Arab. The man who can read the life-history of a camel from a rough track in the sand has a dark mind which sees deep motives in all objective existence and even in inanimate things; he peoples his world with forms that are mere chimera to the Westerner. The mention of a unicorn does not make him laugh.